



02/17/22

From: Azania Brodeur
Occupational Therapist
Creative Interventions, LLC
Abrodeur@creativeinterventions.net
835 Bloomfield Avenue
Windsor, CT

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Azania and I am an Occupational Therapist at Creative Interventions, a state-contracted Birth to Three provider. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. Specifically, I am writing to testify about the negative impact 5 years of level funding and the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Birth To Three services in our State.

Birth to Three is a program that provides early intervention services to families across CT. In 2020, the 19 Birth to Three programs collectively supported 9,425 infants and toddlers with health impairments, developmental delays, social emotional concerns, and autism spectrum disorders. Birth to Three programs are struggling and are in desperate need of additional funding.

Birth to Three has been without a Cost of Living Adjustment since before 2013 and has been subject to continued flat funding for the past five years with no review scheduled for the next two years. Additionally, no American Rescue Plan ACT (ARPA) funds were provided to Birth to Three programs during the pandemic. In comparison, many of our neighboring states have provided rate increases to early intervention programs. For example, Massachusetts' early intervention programs have received a 19.5% increase across the past six years in addition to millions of dollars of COVID relief funds. Virginia's hourly reimbursement rate is 23% higher than CT's, Pennsylvania has received an annual average rate increase of 1.5% for the past 4 years and New Jersey programs received a 5% rate increase in 2021 and a 2.5% increase in 2022.

Birth to Three programs have needed to balance receiving the same pay rate since 2017 while dealing with challenges across the workforce such as increasing salary needs, staff burnout, difficulty with retention and difficulty attracting new clinicians as we cannot be competitive in salary rates when compared to similar private agencies or public schools. To ensure state and federal requirements are met, staff must be highly qualified and receive ongoing training and supervision that currently has no sustainable mechanism for reimbursement. The amount of unreimbursed training requirements for newly hired staff results in a delay to the provision of direct services which leads to a loss of revenue for programs.

In my time at Creative Interventions, I have seen multiple new hires in our zone start and then leave the company after openly stating they will make more money elsewhere. In addition, it is across the board that therapy providers are feeling burnt out. I personally have 6 figures of student loan debt which was the only way I'd be able to get the Masters Degree training needed to hold the title that I do. My current salary makes it impossible for me to afford typical living expenses and pay off my student loans in a timely manner.

Please help Creative Interventions and other essential Birth to Three programs by:

- Including Birth to Three services as part of any Cost of Living Adjustment in the budget
- Revising regulations to provide timely and predictable rate increases for programs to account for doing business in Connecticut.

- Revising funding streams to support short-term and long-term General Administrative Payment increases.
 - Immediately increasing Birth to Three rates to help sustain all Early Intervention agencies in Connecticut.
- Please remember Birth to Three during the upcoming legislative session.

Thank you,

Azania Brodeur, Occupational Therapist